

With the advent of the Spanish-American War in the spring of 1898, Congress authorized the formation of a component in addition to the Regular Army called the Volunteer Army of the United States. Although this force was formed from existing organized militia units from throughout the States, participation was strictly on a volunteer basis and did not constitute a mobilization of forces as it is known today.

Within the young State of South Dakota, President McKinley's call to arms gained the response of the entire First Infantry Regiment of the State's National Guard. The only artillery battery in the Guard came from the town of Clark. Armed with two obsolete 3-inch guns, muzzleloading antiques of the Civil War, the Clark Battery accompanied the regiment on its journey to Sioux Falls, SD, in response to the President's call. Upon arrival, the artillerymen from Clark were informed that, due to their outdated weapons, they would be acceptable for service only as infantry. Faced with this ultimatum, the men of the Clark Battery retorted indignantly that they were artillerymen and returned home — the only unit of the State's First Infantry Regiment not serving in the Spanish-American War.

Although this event may not display the ultimate in soldierly discipline, it does portray the often freewheeling

spirit of the National Guard, as well as the intense pride of professional artillerymen. In recognition of this pride, the 147th Field Artillery Group, a South Dakota Army National Guard unit with service dating back to World War I, chose to reconstitute a horse drawn artillery piece from the old Clark Battery. This was to be the unit's contribution to the nation's bicentennial observance.

The project required almost two years of frustrations and hard work by volunteer members of the 147th Headquarters Battery located in Pierre, SD. In a predominately ranchland area where a large percentage of the population is "born to the saddle," what could be easier? The task would be simply to gather six to eight riders and horses and tie them together with an existing cannon, complete with limber. It sounded simple. Little did anyone envision the formidable task ahead.

In August 1974, a small group of people sat down to outline the obvious needs of the project. (This group was to become the nucleus of the 147th Field Artillery Historical Society.) It was determined that harness, saddles and some type of uniform were needed. Some money was also required but no one felt it would be much. With responsibilities assigned, members went to work completing research on equipment needs and availability. Plans were made for raising money. Optimism still reigned supreme

but reality was soon to be encountered.

The first brush with reality came when it was discovered that the harness with breast collar used by the Fort Sill Half Section was not adopted by the Army until some time after the turn of the 20th century. With the assistance of Mr. Gillett Griswold, director of the Field Artillery and Fort Sill Museum, plans and specifications for the proper harness were obtained. It was manufactured locally. Saddles came from the South Dakota State Museum and private owners and through the purchase of replicas.

By this time the group realized that fairly large sums of money would be needed. However, by enlisting the support of the entire South Dakota Army National Guard and through a grant from the State Bicentennial Commission, adequate funds were available.

Obtaining uniforms proved to be one of the most difficult problems since all the replica dealers contacted were committed to other orders for the bicentennial. Additionally, no records were found to show what uniform, if any, was worn by the Clark Battery. Research did indicate, though, that State and National Guard units were still wearing cast-off Civil War uniforms as late as the turn of the century. With this in mind, a uniform of blue trousers, artillery shell jacket, artillery boots, spurs and forage cap was devised. All uniform items were readily available through replica dealers except the shell jacket. One replica firm did supply authentic fabric, braid, buttons and patterns for the jacket and two unit wives volunteered to make them.

By the summer of 1975, most of the equipment needs had been met and the time had come for a serious look into the problem of locomotion for the gun. Purchase of horses out of existing funds was not possible since the cost was estimated to be \$6,000. Fortunately, two of the full-time National Guard technicians, horsemen MSG Robert Hagemann and SFC Dennis Lyngstad, became the mainstay of the horse procurement effort. Master Sergeant Hagemann gave the project an immediate impetus by offering the services of two registered quarter horses. SP4 Ronald Volmer, another member of the unit, provided two additional horses. Initially, the plan had called for a six-horse

Personnel of the 147th Field Artillery Half Section prepare for action during their initial performance at Redfield, South Dakota, October 1975.

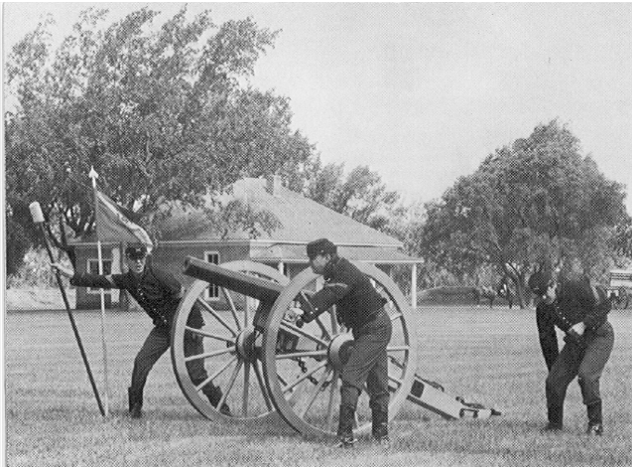


Horse transporter of the 147th Field Artillery Half Section. Artwork done by SGT Merlin Shuh, 665th Ordnance Company (HEM), SDARNG, Mitchell, South Dakota. Front six feet of the semitrailer serves as tack room for half section equipment.

hitch; however, research indicated that the Clark Battery had operated with only four horses per weapon during the late 1800s. In addition to the teams for the gun, mounts were provided for out-riders — a chief of section, a guidon bearer and a bugler.

Since none of the horses had been broken to harness, initial harness training was accomplished one team at a time using normal draft harness and small two-wheeled racing "chariots." When both teams were accustomed to pulling together, the change was made to the artillery harness and hitch with the two teams hitched in tandem. The only difficulty during the harness training was for the teams to become accustomed to the additional weight of the cannon when they were hitched to the gun and limber.

Since all of the horses had at some time appeared in parades, it was anticipated that little difficulty would be encountered working the horses around crowds. Therefore, the primary problem was to accustom the animals to cannon firing. The unit obtained 100 pounds of black cannon powder and authentic friction primers. The men trained in cannoneer duties based on Patten's *Manual of Artillery Drill* of 1861. They were prepared to test their skills as muzzle-loading cannoneers and to observe the reactions of the horses to the cannon firing. On the big day of firing someone fortunately had the foresight to suggest completely unhitching the horses from the limber and leading them off some distance from the gun to observe the firing. With much ado, a prepackaged charge of approximately one pound of black powder was carefully loaded and rammed, the vent hole cleared with the vent pick and the primer inserted — all was ready for firing. Everyone stood aside and watched breathlessly while the lanyard was attached to the primer. That was the last quiet



Misfire! A sometimes occurrence at Fort Sisseton.

moment of the day! As the lanyard was pulled, a resounding "boom" echoed through the area, a large sheet of flame and a cloud of black smoke erupted from the tube . . . and four horses departed the area dragging resisting horse holders in their wake. The remainder of the afternoon was devoted to rounding up horses from the countryside.

By October 1975 the half section was (in theory) ready for its first public appearance. The section joined the South Dakota Bicentennial Wagon Train at Redfield, SD, and performed a firing demonstration for the Redfield fairgrounds crowd. That performance must have been somewhat less than spectacular. The section entered the arena at a gentle trot, unlimbered the gun, carefully removed all the horses from the arena (hiding them behind some nearby buildings) and, after three attempts, managed to fire the cannon. The entire appearance left considerable room for improvement, but at least the project was now officially launched.


The trip to Redfield uncovered two new problem areas, either of which could mean the death of the project. First, a better system for transporting the gun and horses during travels around the state was needed. Second, it was very apparent that the wheels on the 1863 cannon would not survive the bicentennial year without major repair.

A partial solution to the transportation problem came during the summer of 1975 when a boat trailer was located. With modification, it made an excellent transporter for the gun and limber. The men had been using two horse trailers belonging to members of the half section to haul the horses; however, this required three pickup trucks to haul the gun and all the horses. Availability of all the pickups and horse trailers on any given day was questionable. Two enterprising gentlemen of the State maintenance facility solved this problem. They not only obtained a semitrailer with tractor on a loan basis but also, with the artistic talents of SGT Merlin Shuh, completely renovated the trailer. It was painted red, white and blue and decorated with murals of the half section.

The deteriorating cannon wheels became the greatest challenge to date. Over the years, the wood in the wheels had dried and rotted. Sizeable chunks of wood began to flake off whenever the gun was moved. Attempts to locate a wheelwright were futile and, although firms could manufacture new wheels, the cost was prohibitive. Finally, the section initiated an all-out search for the second Clark Battery cannon, hoping to find useable wheels. After tracing many false leads, that gun was found in Watertown, SD. The ravages of time and weather had rendered its wheels in even worse condition than the ones being used. The project seemed doomed until someone came up with the perfect solution — fiberglass. Several coats of excess paint and all the rotted wood were removed by sandblasting the wheels. After sandblasting, there were gaps between the metal rim and the wood and, for a nominal charge, these were filled with fiberglass by a commercial firm. So far, the fiberglassed wheels have been able to withstand every bump and jolt.

In June 1976, the 147th was scheduled to attend annual training at Camp Ripley, MN. It would have been interesting to have been present at Camp Ripley headquarters when, with the normal support requests, a request was received from the 147th FA Group for space to pasture eight horses. Although the request probably caused considerable stir, the reply simply stated that space was being made available for the horses near the post ammunition dump where a large stand of bluegrass was available for pasture. The off-duty hours during annual training provided an ideal time to conduct half section practice sessions.

With extensive off-duty training at Camp Ripley, the half section began to take shape and, when it performed for the Governor of South Dakota, there was little resemblance to the unit seen at Redfield the previous fall. The approach into the demonstration area was made in what could best be described as a controlled runaway. The weapon was unlimbered, horses and limber removed approximately 30 meters from the gun and the chief of section gave the command to fire while mounted on his horse to the immediate rear of the weapon. The half section had finally accomplished what had been envisioned some 20 months before.

During the summer months of 1976, the 147th Field Artillery Half Section traveled more than 3,000 miles throughout South Dakota to present 30 performances to some 150,000 people. These demonstrations occupied nine weekends during a 14-week period. All this was done with little or no recompense for the time and effort devoted to the project. This is indicative of the pride and professionalism not only of the 147th Field Artillery Group, but also of the South Dakota National Guard! 

LTC Clare D. Bedsaul, FA, is Unit Advisor, 147th Field Artillery Group, South Dakota Army National Guard.